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Says history could repeat itself

Professor fears CIA domestic spying

CAMDEN — A historian at Rutgers University's Camden campus is concerned that President Reagan's granting of more power to the CIA in domestic surveillance might "breed unlawful acts against the very people the CIA is trying to protect."

Dr. Jeffery M. Dorwart, an associate professor of history at the State University of New Jersey, warns that the domestic surveillance tactics used with Americans earlier in this century by another intelligence agency — the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, formed more than 50 years before the CIA was born — could be repeated by the CIA if its agents are given too much freedom in internal affairs.

According to Dr. Dorwart, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) violated Americans' civil rights during the years between the two world wars. He outlines these violations in his latest book, "The United States Navy's Intelligence Dilemma, 1919-1945," to be published next spring by the U.S. Naval Institute Press of Annapolis.

He writes, for instance that the ONI "participated in the surreptitious and illegal entry of private property for political purposes, and pursued, with unflagging zeal, domestic radicals and pacifists while, at times, neglecting to follow leads about foreign military and strategic threats."

IN ADDITION, Dr. Dorwart reports, President Roosevelt spied on his own director of Naval Intelligence "to find out if the director was making remarks against him behind his back, a possibility that F.D.R. had reason to believe as the director was, indeed, bad-mouthing him. F.D.R. wanted to see if the director was loyal to him and to his foreign policy."

Dr. Dorwart discovered in his research that many of the Navy's top intelligence officers became extremely disillusioned or ill, and were prematurely reassigned during the years between the wars.

"The disillusionment and illness were due to the tensions that developed over whether they should be strictly naval officers conducting strategy, or domestic spies," Dr. Dorwart explains.

As for the premature reassignments, he says: "The Department of the Navy usually took this action to make way for someone it felt would be more pliable. Some of the officers didn't fit the image the Navy wanted to maintain, so officers bounced in and out. There was also a lot of bureaucratic in-fighting in the Navy, particularly between 1939 and 1941.

IN THIS SECOND volume of Dr. Dorwart's definitive history of the ONI between 1882 and 1945 (the first book, also published by the Naval Institute Press, is titled "The Office of Naval Intelligence: The Birth of America's First Intelligence Agency"), the Rutgers educator discusses the contradiction betwen the ONI's legal responsibilities to gather information and provide security for the U.S. Navy and government, and the office's operation as an intelligence agency "which moved inevitably toward secret operations and extralegal conduct."

Dr. Dorwart points out that "while the ONI was supposed to be looking for German and Japanese enemies, they frequently went off looking for Americans who they thought were communists. I'm not saying the ONI was sinister or inherently evil, but that, in doing their job, they felt they had to look at everything and everybody."

Dr. Dorwart maintains there was and continues to be "a dilemma of how far you should go in observing threats in this country.

"But the FBI or police forces, rather than the CIA, ought to be used to investigate internal threats to security," he believes.

Specific steps should be taken to prevent a recurrence of domestic surveillance activities such as were employed by the ONI, Dr. Dorwart stresses.

"To the dismay of some Naval Intelligence Officers," he relates, "the dilemma persisted no matter how hard they tried to pursue legal methods and a strict definition of the naval interest.

"BUT TO OTHERS," he continues, "the intelligence dilemma was part of the job, and they launched clandestine operations, employed secret agents and collaborated with and competed against intelligence amateurs and professionals from other agencies."

Thus, Dr. Dorwart observes, U.S. Naval Intelligence officers between 1919 and 1945 were either "willing participants, untainted observers or victims of the intelligence dilemma." But all "hovered about the edges of diplomatic and military decision-making, most often as unimportant bureaucratic drones but at moments operating close to the centers of power where they might influence a critical naval or national policy."

That, he points out, is why he is concerned about the amount of power given today's CIA, an organization formed two years after the close of World War II.

Dr. Dorwart began the research for his books on the ONI five years ago "while nosing around the National Archives in Washington, D.C. I found the ONI collection and an archivist said nobody had ever looked at it before. I did some secondary reading and found the information could be developed into a couple of books."

In addition to completing an exhaustive examination of ONI records, Dr. Dorwart studied the private correspondence of Naval Intelligence offices and attaches. For two years, he commuted frequently between teh nation's capital and his home in Elmer, and was aided in the preparation and writing of his book by two Rutgers Research Council grants.

Next on his agenda is research on the first secretary of defense, James Forrestal, and military unification.

"I intend," Dr. Dorwart says, "to make naval history my writing specialty. I want to become one of the recognized U.S. Naval historians."